

PrePass Rewards The Good Guys

Truckers with good safety records in 1998 received a green light nearly a million times, after weighing their big rigs at freeway speeds, to bypass the California Highway Patrol's inspection facilities.

Bypasses by trucks participating in California's PrePass program increased four-fold in 1998 over 1997. The program cuts truckers' costs, reduces long lines at scales and frees CHP inspectors to concentrate on less safe trucks.

PrePass is a high-tech electronic system that uses a "black box" attached to a truck windshield to allow the CHP to identify the vehicle, check its credentials and safety rating, and weigh it. This is accomplished via a series of freeway sensors, a scale embedded in the pavement and a computer at the CHP's inspection facility.

"PrePass increases highway safety by reducing traffic backups from trucks entering and leaving the inspection facilities," said Chief Lee Denno of the Enforcement Services Division.

Denno said PrePass also allows the CHP's inspection facilities to reduce the number of static scale weigh-ins and to focus on inspections of trucks which have poor maintenance records or are not compliant with regulations.

The first PrePass site in the nation was established in 1995 at the CHP's Dunsmuir Inspection Facility on Interstate 5 in Northern California. Since then, PrePass has expanded to 14 other states. A total of 55 PrePass sites are open, including 25 in California.

Sixty-four thousand trucks participate in the PrePass program nationwide, of which over 15,000 trucks are California-based. Sixty-two thousand trucks have enrolled to bypass in California.

The program operates by signing up trucking companies or owner/operators who have a successful safety record during regular CHP inspections at their truck terminals.

PrePass trucks are outfitted with a black transponder the size of a pocket radio which is programmed with the truck's identification number.

A mile from the inspection facility, the moving truck passes under a "reader" positioned like a light standard across the freeway. As it passes under the reader, the truck is weighted by a high-speed, weigh-in-motion sensor embedded in the pavement.

A CHP officer at the inspection facility immediately receives on a computer terminal the truck weight and a full report regarding the vehicle from a data base provided by PrePass and the state Department of Motor Vehicles. The PrePass data base is updated daily.

About a quarter of a mile later, the truck approaches a second freeway reader, which gives the vehicle a green light or a red light. A red signal requires the driver to pull in for a second weighing on the static scale and a possible inspection. A green signal tells the driver his truck is cleared.

The driver is free to continue on the road without stopping.

PrePass is operated by the CHP in partnership with Help, Inc., a non-profit partnership of states committed to

Quick Facts About PrePass

California	15,000 trucks
Nationwide	62,000 trucks
CHP PrePass facilities	25
California bypasses in 1998	981,000

advanced transportation technology. A 99-cent fee is charged for every truck that bypasses the scale, up to a maximum of \$4 a day.

Walt Keeney, owner of the California-based Food Express, was a pioneer in the demonstration project that preceded PrePass. “I’ve got PrePass account #1,” Keeney said.

The savings in time, fuel and aggravation for his 40 PrePass-equipped trucks are substantial, Keeney said. “On a day where a driver is doing short hauls between Sacramento and Oakland, he might pass the scale eight times. He doesn’t have to stop at all, as long as his weight is correct.”

“It’s also a big morale thing for the drivers. They just love to drive by weigh stations,” Keeney said.



A TRUCK approaches a PrePass “reader” on the freeway which will identify and weigh PrePass participants as they approach a CHP inspection facility.



A TRANSPONDER (inset) programmed with the vehicle’s PrePass identification number is mounted in the cab of Jason Ehrlich’s truck as he heads out of the Applegate Drayage terminal in Sacramento.